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ABSTRACT

Evidence presented by the National School Food Service and Nutrition Education Finance Project shows clearly that present State and federal legislation affecting the school food service program is not consistent with the basic values and beliefs of this country, nor is that legislation consistent with the legitimate and appropriate purposes of State and Federal government. (Author)

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IS A PUBLICLY FINANCED SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM CONSISTENT WITH OUR BASIC VALUES AND BELIEFS AND WITH STATE AND FEDERAL OBJECTIVES?

by
R. L. Johns

It is with great regret that I could not personally present this paper to the national meeting of the American School Food Service Association. Unfortunately, my duties as Director of the National Educational Finance Project prevented me from accepting your invitation to speak to your group. The Office of Education called a meeting of a group which in planning the activities of the proposed National Institute of Education on the same date as today. Since the planning group is developing a design for research on educational finance, the Office requested me to attend that meeting. The nature of future research on educational finance is likely to have an important effect on education and also the school food service program. Therefore, I felt it essential that I attend the meeting of the planning group for the Institute although frankly I am sure that I would have enjoyed much more the privilege of meeting with your group.

The report of the National School Food Service and Nutrition Education Finance Project, a satellite project of the National Educational Finance Project, revealed that state legislation concerning the school food service and nutrition education program is generally incomplete and inadequate. Federal legislation also is far from ideal. Despite all the progress that had been made in School Food Service, only approximately 39 percent of all pupils enrolled in the elementary and secondary school today receive a plate lunch.

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I spoke to the national meeting of the American School Food Service Association first in 1947. At that time, 24 years ago, I recommended that all non-food costs of the school food service program be paid from tax funds. I spoke to the national meeting of your group again in 1967 (20 years later) and recommended that at least all non-food costs of the school food service program be financed from public funds but that there is much evidence that indicates it would be sound public policy to pay the entire cost of the school food service programs from public funds.

The United States Department of Agriculture has estimated that the operating costs of the school food service program totaled approximately $2,113 million in 1968-69. The Department estimated that the federal state and local governments contributed $744.3 or 35.1 percent of this a amount. If all pupils attending the public schools had been provided with adequate school food service in 1968-69, the total cost would have been approximately 5 billion dollars. The non-food costs of the school food service program now approximate almost 50 percent of operating costs. If one half of the 5 billion had been provided from public funds, the amount received from public sources would have been 2-1/2 billion instead of $744 million. If $2-1/2 billion in public funds had been available for the school food service program in 1968-69 far more than 39 percent of the pupils would have participated in that program.

Why have we not provided more adequate funding from public sources for the school food service program? Why do many states and even the federal government have inadequate legislation providing for the school

food service and nutrition programs? Is a publicly financed school food service program consistent with ~~one~~ our basic values and beliefs and with state and federal objectives?

Volume 5 of the National Educational Educational Finance Project entitled Alternative Programs for the Financing of Education has just gone to press. This 400 page volume presents the recommendations of the National Educational Finance Project and the basic values and beliefs on which the recommendations were based. Let us examine those basic values and beliefs and see if they have any relevance to the school food service program. Following is an abstract of the statement of basic values and beliefs presented in Chapter 1 of Volume 5 of the National Educational Finance Project and some comments on their application to the school food service program.

1. Equalization of Educational Opportunity

"We believe that the opportunity to obtain a public education appropriate to the individual needs of children and youth should be substantially equal. We believe that the educational opportunity of every individual should be a function of the total taxable wealth of the state and not limited primarily to the taxing ability in the local school district. Numerous studies have shown that educational opportunities vary widely within most states and that these variations are due principally to variation in wealth among the school districts of a state."

"Acceptance of the belief that substantially equal educational opportunity should be provided for all pupils requires that we support a policy of general federal aid for the public schools. There are substantial variations among the states in their financial ability to support education. If we support the proposition that the quality

of public education, which a state provides, should be a function of the total taxable wealth of the state, it seems logical that we should also support the proposition that the total taxable wealth of the nation should be utilized to ensure that an adequate quality of public education is provided in every state. Under-educated, disadvantaged people move from state to state creating problems wherever they go. Each state has a vested interest in the quality of education provided in other states. Therefore, the federal government as well as state and local governments must be concerned not only with the equalization of edu ational opportunity but also with the quantity of public education. We believe in an economic system based on free enterprise but that system is not really "free" without equality of educational opportunity."

I do not see how we can provide educational opportunities to under-nourished and malnourished children equal to the opportunities available to properly nourished children. Hungry unhealthy children do not learn as well as healthy, well nourished children. Whether a school child eats or goes hungry should not depend on the income of his parents. Neither should he be made an object of charity. Therefore, a publicly financed, adequate school food service program is consistent with our belief in equalization of educational opportunity.

2. Social Mobility

"We believe that public education should tend to remove the barriers between caste and class and promote social mobility. That is the essence of the American dream. Every child regardless of his race, national origin, religion or the economic condition of his parents should be given an equal

chance in the public schools to develop his talents to the fullest in order that he may have equal access to the benefits of the American social, political and economic system."

Social mobility depends to a large extent upon how well the talents of each child are developed regardless of his social and economic class. Full participation of all pupils in the school food service programs not only promotes health which enhances learning but it also provides an opportunity for socialization and desirable interaction in a pleasant atmosphere. Therefore, the school food service programs promotes social mobility.

3. The Economy and Education

"We believe that an adequate investment in public education is essential to economic growth. Expenditures for education are an investment in people as well as a consumption expenditure. Education in this technological age has become essential to the growth of the economy and the survival of the individual."

The school food service program is a part of the total school program. Expenditures for school food service provide a market for the private economy and also increases the value of human capital.

4. Equity of Tax Structure

"We believe that the public schools should be supported by an equitable tax structure. Usually, equity is considered to require: '(1) equal treatment of equals; (2) distribution of the overall tax burden on the basis of ability to pay, as measured by income, by wealth, by consumption; (3) exclusion from tax of persons in the lowest income groups, on the grounds that they have no taxpaying capacity; and

(4) a progressive overall distribution of tax relative to income, on the basis that tax capacity rises more rapidly than income...' "

There is no more reason to require the parents of children to pay for their lunches than to require them to pay for them to ride on a school bus. Payment for a lunch is in effect a tax. Most of the pupils attending school are within the compulsory school age. To compel children to go to school makes it impossible for their parents to provide an adequate lunch. It then becomes a public responsibility to provide school food service. To require parents of children to finance the school food service program is to levy an inequitable tax on them. Therefore, a publicly financed school food service program is consistent with one belief in an equitable tax structure.

5. Accountability. We believe that educational output should be maximized per dollar of financial input. To collect money from children, requires a great deal of time and bookkeeping on the part of teachers and other school employees. This costs money and is an overhead cost that could be eliminated by full public funding of the school food service program. Furthermore, full public funding of the school food service program would result in almost 100 percent participation and this would provide full opportunity to take advantage of economies of scale in operation

6. Federalism

"We believe in the concept of federalism as applied to education. We believe that the federal government, the state governments and local school districts all have appropriate roles to play in providing for public education. The concern about education is so pervasive and the

impact of education so vital that no level of government can have exclusive responsibility for public education. If the federal government plays its proper role, state governments are strengthened and if state governments play their proper role, local school governments are better enabled to perform their responsibility for operating the schools and if local governments play their role properly, the whole nation is strengthened. Under the concept of federalism, each level of government strenghtens rather than weakens the other levels of government. The interaction and cooperation of federal, state, and local governments with each other should stimulate desirable changes and innovations and increase educational productivity."

The concept of federalism applies as well to the school food service program as to other educational programs and services. The states that have the best school food service programs are those states in which the state and local school districts have accepted their respective responsibilities for the school food service program in cooperation with the federal government.

Let us now turn to the purposes of the state and federal governments. The Tenth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States provides "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution or prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the states respectively or to the people." This amendment in effect makes the state primarily responsible for education. In fact state constitutions generally state that education is a state responsibility. Since the school food service program is legally a part of the total school program, it is the

responsibility of each state legislature to enact appropriate legislation for the financing, governance, supervision and administration of the school food service program.

Does the federal government also have a legal responsibility for the school food service program? Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution reads as follows: "The Congress shall have power to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imports and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States...". Although this clause deals with many other important matters, it is commonly called the General Welfare Clause. Under this clause the federal government has the primary responsibility for providing for the general welfare. The federal government has accepted a number of objectives which are directed at "providing for the general welfare." Let us now examine some of those purposes or objectives and see if federal participation in provision for the school food service programs is consistent with those legitimate federal purposes. Following is a quotation from Chapter 8 of Volume 5 of the National Educational Finance Project entitled Alternative Programs for the Financing of Education.

"In deciding what educational purposes are worthy and appropriate for the Federal Government, first consideration should be given to those educational problems which transcend state lines. Since educational deficiencies cannot be quarantined within state boundaries, educational isolationalism practiced by individual states cannot be sound national policy. The Federal Government clearly has a responsibility to act to strengthen public schools in all states. Only by so doing can a state be protected from the spillover effects of educational neglect in other states. Thus, one worthy and appropriate purpose of Federal action is to

make general purpose grants to states to supplement state and local funds and to encourage states to expend for public schools amounts needed to maintain an adequate basic school program for all children and youth who choose to attend the public schools."

"In addition to this general concern for strengthening the total ongoing public school program in each state, the Federal Government has a special responsibility to assist in the education of disadvantaged children. This responsibility has its origins deep in the history of our country, although immediate concern arises partly from the large number of educationally disadvantaged families that have migrated from one state to another in recent years. Thus, a second worthy and appropriate purpose of Federal action is to provide special purpose grants for compensatory or remedial education to assist states in educating disadvantaged children."

"The Federal Government has increasingly accepted responsibility for reducing unemployment, and Congress has, in recent years, enacted a number of laws to this end. But unemployment cannot be eliminated without suitable vocational education programs in all states. In order to meet its responsibility for full employment, a worthy and appropriate purpose of Federal action is to provide special grants to states for vocational programs for adults."

"For many years, the federal government has recognized that "promotion of the general welfare" includes assisting in the elimination of hunger, the improvement of the health of the nation and in the assurance of an adequate and stabilized supply of food for the nation. These are certainly legitimate ~~and~~ national purposes. The appropriate of federal

funds for school food service programs, including school lunch, school milk, special assistance for the needy, nutrition education, distribution of surplus commodities and similar programs are consistent with legitimate national purposes."

I might add that federal participation in the school food service program is consistent with the federal purposes of reducing unemployment, improving the health of the nation, reducing crime, assuring that the nation has an adequate food supply, and alleviating the problem of the culturally and socially disadvantaged.

It is not my prupose to suggest to you what changes and additions should be made in existing federal and state legislation affecting the financing, control, supervision and administratinn of the school food service program. There are those among you who are much more knowledgeable in that area than I. However, the evidence presented by the National School Food Service and Nutrition Education Finance Project shows clearly that present state and federal legislation affecting the school food service program is not consistent with our basic values and beliefs, nor is that legislation consistent with the legitimate and appropriate purposes of state and federal government.